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CIA-reunion

The Central Intelligence Agency is going back to school, alas. After 19 years in the academic doghouse for its sins, venal and mortal, against the sanctity of the Ivory Tower, the CIA this week let it be leaked that it was "restoring" its ties to the nation's campuses. The agency is slow to admit what has not already long transpired, so the safe money would be on the proposition that the buggers have been back in the bell tower for years.

America loves a sequel, and this one promises to be spectacular enough to at the least keep the inappropriate news of the president's rectal examinations off the front page. The last time the CIA snuggled up to the universities the reputations of both institutions were sullied. In the '60s the CIA through the magic of its unvouchered funds turned boring professors into ersatz Scarlet Pimpernels and gave their drip-dry wives thrilling first-class transportation at taxpayers' expense to exotic climes where their intellectual hubbles did the bidding of their CIA patriarchs.

The classic of the CIA's corruption of independent academia was Michigan State University's project in Vietnam, where the university knowingly provided academic cover for CIA agents and its professors helped set up a dictatorship under the guise of advising a democracy. "The Palace Guard is being put through another class in revolver training ..." a Michigan State professor wrote from Saigon to his department head back on campus.

Gary Wills once termed these professors-on-the-make who preferred the big bucks and big bangs of secret government duty to the routine rigors of scholarship as "Bogart professors."

The heyday of the Bogart professor, of course, was back in the '60s when the Bill Cosby was playing a likeable CIA agent on TV and the CIA enjoyed a semigood-guy reputation. Helping out the CIA, then, might have seemed to some well-meaning academic chowderheads as something somehow expected, like giving to the United Crusade.

This was before the deluge of late '80s CIA exposes (I will admit to no neutrality as this subject, as I was then the editor of Ramparts magazine which dumped buckets of bilge on the agency) that revealed that the CIA, operating in violation of its charter, had hired intellectuals, leased universities and co-opted professors and students alike into becoming no better than spies. This was at the cost of many hundreds of millions and the national disgrace that the free institutions we trumpeted in America had been in fact secretly compromised by the CIA.

To ease off on the academic hacks, it should be noted that the CIA glue-sniffers got most every American institution hooked on their wicked ways — the record of the Congressional hearings on how the CIA violated its charter *not* to operate in the United States shows that the agency got its funny money into the pants of the National Council of Churches, the American Newspaper Guild, the National Education Association, The Congress for Cultural Freedom, The United Auto Workers et cetera, et cetera.

National outrage was expressed, a Presidential Commission was formed, hearings were held — and it was solemnly declared that the CIA would never, ever again muck around with free American

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This solemn declaration of principle can now be tossed onto the scrapheap of failed national will. Time erodes morality more than the sea does the pier, and the CIA is now actually bragging of its renewed linkage to the very universities from which it was once rightfully expelled.

The CIA says it is "seeking advice" from the universities on matters of complicated moment, with no strings attached. The CIA's code of honor toward academic integrity is that of the dog for the fireplug: It is all a matter of location and convenience. Harvard was stung last fall with the revelation in the campus newspaper The Crimson that unknown to the university administration a professor of Middle Eastern Studies had accepted some \$150,000 from the CIA to subsidize a book (published by the university press) and to sponsor a conference (at the Harvard faculty club) on Mideast politics. The rub was that the professor had signed a contract with the CIA that said the "Government" had the right to censor whatever scholarship he produced.

The professor said that he had not disclosed his devil's bargain with the CIA because it was a "personal" contract — university rules require that if a professor gets a government contract he has to give the school two-thirds of the loot for overhead. "No one in his right mind takes a contract on this (the university) side of the street when he can take it on his own side of the street," said a Harvard graduate school dean. So much for the principle of academic independence, and the question of whether the CIA's renewed interest in the nation's campuses will strengthen the iron will of free scholarship.

I've got two daughters in college, and I hope they don't go for graduate degrees. If the CIA keeps on track, we can only anticipate some ruined co-eds.